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ABSTRACT

A recent study showed that many adolescents cannot effectively navigate the labor market. They do not know how to obtain a job nor how to leave one gracefully. In this study on the school-to-work transition, interviews were conducted with 25 adolescents over a one-year time span. Researchers observed the youths at work and interviewed their managers. Major findings were reported for four areas: finding a job, surviving on the job, training at the work site, and leaving a job. Some of the highlights of these findings are the following: (1) youths viewed finding a job as a matter of luck, rarely conducted an organized job search, and wanted good pay and job security with little attention to a career path; (2) attendance and punctuality were often a problem, unless employers were supportive--but many employers did not expect youths to remain long and did not invest much time or resources in them; (3) little training was provided to the new hires; aand (4) many youths quit jobs without notice or were fired and often disagreed with their employer about the reason for leaving. The study concluded that school administrators should implement employability development programs to ease students' transition from school to work. It also stressed that counselors and teachers can show youths how to conduct a job search and how to leave a job gracefully. (KC)

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Education & Employment

Research for the Practitioner

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The Adolescent Worker: A Field Study of Employed and Nonemployed Youth

Research Findings

Many adolescents cannot effectively navigate the labor market. They do not know how to obtain a job nor how to leave one gracefully. In a study on school-to-work transition, interviews were conducted with 25 adolescents over a 1-year time span. Researchers observed the youth at work and interviewed their managers. Major findings are reported for four areas: finding a job, surviving on the job, training at the work site, and leaving a job.

Finding a job:

- Youth viewed getting a job as a matter of luck. Very few combined several job search strategies in an organized and systematic manner.
- Pay and job security were most important in seeking a job, with little attention given to a career path.
- Youth were more likely to rely on friends and relatives for information on job openings than on want ads, employment services, and other more formal means.

Surviving on the job:

- Attendance and punctuality conflicts were the two most frequently cited problems that resulted in verbal warnings, written reprimands, and dismissals.
- Much less turnover occurred in work settings that provided either a supportive work environment or a mentor to guide the new hire.
- Many employers did not expect the adolescent worker to remain on the job much longer than 6 months and, therefore, did not invest much time or resources in their youth labor force.

Training at the work site:

- Of the training incidents observed, 44 percent were conducted by co-workers, 31 percent by supervisors, 21 percent by managers, and 3 percent by training specialists.
- Of the training incidents observed, 92 percent lasted 30 minutes or less and 76 percent lasted 5 minutes or less.
- Of the training incidents observed, 71 percent were verbal instructions, 24 percent were demonstrations, 3 percent were classes, and 2 percent included print material.
- Only 9 percent of the training incidents observed were evaluated. Of those, nearly 50 percent were evaluated nonverbally (the trainer would watch the new hire complete the assigned task).

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Leaving a job:

- Twenty-eight percent of the sample did not change jobs and 16 percent did receive a promotion.
- Of the 72 percent of the youth that changed jobs, 9 youth were fired, and there were 18 incidents of quitting.
- Twenty-six percent of the youth who left a job did so without giving notice to the employer or continually called in sick until the employer "got the message." By handling their exit in such a manner, these youth will not be able to use the employer as a reference in the future and are in danger of getting a bad recommendation if they even mention the job on their resume.
- Young workers who left a job often disagreed with their employer about the reason for leaving.

Implications

These findings indicate that school administrators should implement employability development programs to ease students' transition from school to work.

- Counselors can help youth learn how to organize and conduct a systematic job search by introducing job search materials and having students organize a job search file of employer contacts.
- Teachers can help students learn how training occurs on the job and structure cooperative team activities for students so that they learn to help each other.
- Counselors and teachers can emphasize to students the benefits of leaving a job gracefully by stressing the importance of an exit interview. Not only will students become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, but they will also gain the respect of their employers.

Five fastbacks or pamphlets designed for classroom use by secondary students were developed from the study. They contain case studies that describe adolescents' experiences in the labor market. A series of questions and activities for the student are based on the experiences described. The topics are "Finding a Job," "Becoming an Insider," "Training at the Worksite," "Leaving a Job Gracefully," and a "Teacher's Guide."

Additional Information

A more detailed summary of the study was published in the fall 1985 (vol. 3, no. 13) issue of *Facts & Findings*, a calendar subscription research series. To request ordering information for *Facts & Findings* or the fastbacks described here, contact the National Center's Program Information Office toll free at 800-848-4815 or 614-486-3655 (in Ohio and outside the continental U.S.). Cable: CTVOCEDOSU/ Columbus, Ohio. Telex: 8104821894.

This is the seventh of a series of eight "research briefs" highlighting findings of studies on education and employment conducted by the National Center and sponsored by the National Institute of Education. The summary was prepared by Ruth Gordon of the Resource and Referral Service.

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Classroom materials based on this research will be available in 1986. Contact the National Center's Program Information Office for availability of unique new materials in THE EMPLOYER'S CHOICE series, a package for teaching students successful techniques for getting and keeping jobs.

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